Stefansson Says Good-by to Last Eskimo and Returns to America

JOHNNY CARPENTER, AGE 5, *and* MARY CARPENTER, AGE 4, CHILDREN *of* UNALASKA ALASKA.

THE LAST *of* THE VICTORIA ISLANDERS. A GROUP *of* YOUNG WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHED *by* MR. STEFFANSSON *at* PRINCE ALBERT SOUND.

MAMAYOUK, *the* ESKIMO WOMAN WHO WAS PART *of the* EXPLORER'S EXPEDITION *from the* BEGINNING *and* WENT THROUGH LONG JOURNEYS, BLIZZARDS *and* FAMINES WITH UNDISTURBED GOOD SPIRITS.

Story of the Eventful Journey From Victoria Island to the Mainland, During Which a Seal Supplies Food When the Supply Runs Out

By VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON.

MAY 17th we had said good-by to the last Eskimo we saw in Victoria Island. Their camp lay a little west of the middle of Prince Albert Sound. Although it must have been nearly two months since they started with loaded sledges on the eastward journey from their winter hunting district on the southeast shore of Banks Island, they were still living chiefly on supplies of polar bear meat brought with them; but the time had come for them to start the caribou hunt.

Some of their friends already had moved into the mountains to the north that separate Prince Albert Sound from Minto Inlet, and it was the intention of those last three families with whom we had been visiting to follow them northward the day after our departure. As a matter of fact, they would have gone even sooner had it not been for our visit.

I think it was Cape Back on Victoria Island for which we headed on leaving the Eskimo village. The charts were not very accurate here, any more than anywhere else in the Arctic, and it is only the most conspicuous points that one can certainly identify. After travelling for about four hours we camped to give me a chance to enter in my diary more fully the varied information of which I had taken only hasty notes during our stay with the people.

Caribou Moving Northwest.

In something like twelve miles of travel this day we must have crossed at least five hundred caribou tracks, but most of them were over a week old. The general direction in which the trails led was approximately northwest. We saw only three bands, of eight, seven and three animals, respectively. All of them were too wild to allow us a close approach, although Natkusiak fired two or three vain shots at one of the bands.

We saw no seals either. It was as yet too early for the common seal (factiba) to appear on top of the ice, and the bearded seals frequent in general only the neighborhood of land. We expected that to-morrow on our approach to land we should see some of them.

Our sled was so heavily loaded with the ethnological specimens purchased and the geological ones picked up on Victoria Island that it was impossible for us to haul much meat with us. Our second day, therefore, found us nearly out of food, when, according to expectations, on approaching within about seven miles of Cape Back we saw a bearded seal lying beside a tide crack out of which it had hauled itself. It was an especially wakeful animal and it took Natkusiak over two hours to make a successful approach. As neither the dogs nor ourselves had had quite enough to eat in the morning, we camped near where the animal was killed and allowed the dogs to gorge themselves.

Hewed Roads With Axe.

From Cape Back until we rounded Cape Baring we had rougher ice than we were used to and our heavy and bulky load made the going somewhat difficult. Here and there we were forced to use an axe which we had along with us for the purpose of road making, and it sometimes took us an hour to make fifteen or twenty yards. Between Cape Baring and what the Admiralty chart calls "Cape Kendall" the ice also was rough, and moreover the weather was so thick with falling snow and fog that we could seldom see more than a few hundred yards.

When we reached "Cape Kendall" we had come to the point from which our traverse of the western end of Dolphin and Union straits had to be begun. Following the island coast around toward Point Williams, where the straits were narrower, might have been the safer thing to do at this season of the year, for spring was approaching and the ice in the open sea could be expected to break up with a strong wind at any time and to float to the westward, carrying us off with it. But following the coast any farther was very much out of the way, and besides I had a special reason for wanting to cross the straits just at their western ends, where the charts place "Clerk Island."

Looking for an Island.

On our way east along the coast of the mainland the year before we had kept a keen lookout for Clerk Island, but had failed to see it. According to the account of its discoverer, Sir John Richardson, it is a good sized island lying not more than twelve miles off the mainland shore. It happens that on this part of the mainland the Melvill mountains are near the coast, and it had therefore been an easy thing for me to climb a few hundred feet into their slopes for the purpose of sweeping the sea ice with my glasses. The weather on this portion of our eastward journey had fortunately been clear, and although the mountains of Victoria Island itself, sixty miles away, were clearly visible, there was no sign of Clerk Island, although under the conditions of visibility which we had I should have been able to see an Eskimo camp had it been no farther offshore than Richardson describes Clerk Island as being.

It had for a year been fairly clear in my mind that Clerk Island did not exist, and I was anxious to put the matter beyond doubt by crossing now in a direct line from "Cape Kendall" to Point Kinney, which should take us across the site of Clerk Island.

A Delay in Meal Hours.

As the common seals were not yet out, we decided that if we took to the ice of the straits with our sled empty of meat (as it already was, for we had finished all we had taken with us of the seal killed two days before), we should probably starve, for none but common seals could be expected anywhere over five miles from shore. We were sailing so close to the wind in the matter of provisions, on account of the weight of our load, that any untoward circumstance such as bad weather was sure to bring us to grief.

It happened here that the weather remained unfavorable, cloudy, and with snow squalls. We camped for two days without being able to secure anything to eat. Of course we knew the tide was bound to turn soon, and the matter caused us no anxiety except that the season was advancing and each day the crossing of the straits would become more and more dangerous.

The third day dawned bright and clear, and by 9 o'clock in the morning the snow was thawing all around us. This was the first thaw we had seen in Victoria Island. With the coming out of the sun the seals came out also, and Natkusiak and I soon had one each. By the middle of the afternoon (May 26) we were on the road to the mainland, heading direct for Point Tinney, and taking our course from a conspicuous mountain on the mainland which we knew from the year before.

A Conservative Explorer.

It is possible more than half a century after the event, and long after the death of the distinguished explorer-naturalist who first described the mainland shore of Dolphin and Union Straits, to read his psychology, to an extent, as though the man himself were with us, by comparing his printed account with the facts. He was evidently rigorously truthful in matters of fact, but "conservative" in his judgments. If he says the formation is red sandstone, one may be sure it is sandstone, and red; if he were to say he measured a stratum and found it ten feet thick, I should feel sure it was ten feet thick; but if he says he estimated the stratum at ten feet, I should feel sure it was more than ten feet, and anything from fifteen to forty feet in all probability. That is "conservatism"—to be sure you always underestimate everything.

In crossing Dolphin and Union Straits we had one of the many striking examples of this that have come to our notice. Richardson estimates the height of the Melville Mountains on the mainland at about five hundred feet. We could see them from Victoria Island to the vicinity of Point Dease Thompson, though we stood on the sea ice. In other words, the higher sections of the mountains must be from 1,500 to 2,000 feet high.

During our stay at "Cape Kendall" we found that it was not a cape at all but an island. This surprised me not so very greatly, for while the Admiralty charts of this region are good enough to sail by, one is accustomed to finding them unreliable in the details of the coast. Indeed they cannot well be anything else, for most of them are made from ships of great draught standing a long way offshore. From the masthead of such a ship even in clear weather there is much difficulty in seeing the true character of the coast line, and bad weather of course makes this impossible.

Dr. Rae's Excellent Work.

The interesting thing about our discovery that "Cape Kendall" is an island is not that we discovered it, but the fact that Dr. John Rae had discovered it long before, as I have since learned from consulting his contribution to Vol. 22 of the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society. In his excellent journey in 1851 he had found here an island which he had named Bell Island, and he had located it correctly off the mouth of a bay which in reality exists exactly as he portrays it on his sketch map.

Collinson, when he sailed past this point a year or two later, made observation to the effect that, true enough, at a distance, this looks like an island, but on close approach he found it to be part of the mainland and he therefore struck out the name of Bell Island and called it "Cape Kendall," and his "correction" was adopted by the makers of the Admiralty chart.

We camped at the spot for several days and hunted seals all around the island and found it to be shaped as Dr. Rae indicates in his chart, to be located with reference to the bay exactly as he locates it, and to be separated from the mainland by a fairly deep channel as is shown by the presence everywhere of ice cakes which must draw at least twelve or fifteen feet of water.

This is but one of the many instances of which I am aware that show the excellence of the work of John Rae, a man exact and truthful and in his methods of travel a generation ahead of his time, for while his countrymen were still using the (in many ways absurd) methods of travel which handicapped them so greatly and led to so much needless suffering and to so many deplorable tragedies, he had put into effect the only sound principle of the traveller—that of doing in Rome as the Romans do, which in the Arctic means using methods of travel which the forces of evolution have taught to the dwellers of icy lands, instead of methods which men, some of them ingenious and energetic, have evolved from their inner consciousness and from the limited experience of half a dozen years.

It is a striking thing that John Rae wintered in Repulse Bay, using only the food and fuel which nature has provided at Repulse Bay, and that he did this within a decade of the time when Sir John Franklin's entire company of able bodied Englishmen, equipped quite as well as Rae's party, starved helplessly and died to the last man in a country as well supplied with food and fuel as was that where Rae spent his winter in comfort.

That the country where Franklin's men starved is sufficiently provided with means of subsistence is shown by the fact that it was peopled by Eskimo both before and after that great tragedy. At the very time when these Englishmen were dying of hunger there were living all about them Eskimo families who were taking care of their aged and bringing up their children in comparative plenty, unaided by the rifles and other excellent implements which the Englishmen had in abundance.

When we parted with Dr. Anderson and Capt. Bernard I had told them it was our intention to proceed to Banks Island and spend the summer there. It was arranged that the Teddy Bear would come along whenever the ice cleared off and would pick us up in the neighborhood of Nelson Head, but in case anything occurred to change our plans we were to build conspicuous beacons at one or more of half a dozen designated points on the shore of Victoria Island. The Teddy Bear when she came along would keep a keen lookout for these beacons and would get any information we had left in them.

We had now made up our minds not to go to Banks Island because of learning that it was uninhabited in summer, and as Bell Island ("Cape Kendall") was one of the proposed beacon sites, we built on its southwest corner a tall cairn of stones and left there a short account of our doings and plans, enclosed in one of our airtight malted milk tins. We had long ago consumed the last of the malted milk, but we still kept a few of the cans with us, for they were excellently made and ideal receptacles for matches or anything else that must not be dampened or affected by the weather. Of course, this can would have been plunder to the Eskimo had they found it, but we knew that none of them were due to visit "Cape Kendall" until the spring of the following year, and we felt sure the Teddy Bear would come along before then, as she eventually did.

I learned later from Dr. Anderson that it was on July 30, or a little more than two months after we built the cairn, that they sighted it with their glasses from the schooner eight or ten miles out at sea and came in to pick up the message. Incidentally they verified in summer what I had seen clearly enough in winter, that the place is really an island and not a cape.

Startling Climatic Change.

Few things in my travelling experience have been so startling as the change in climate apparent on our southwestward journey of sixty miles. The morning of our day of leaving Bell Island was the first thaw of the year at that place. The second day out from there, thirty or so miles to the southwest, it became evident that warm spring weather had been in force for a considerable time, for the snow was nearly gone off the ice. A few of the deeper snowdrifts only remained and water channels furrowed the surface everywhere.

On the third day this became still more apparent, and on the fourth, when we approached the mainland shore, the ice was in a condition that could be produced only by three weeks or a month of thaws. The tide cracks which at this season of the year should in the neighborhod of Victoria Island be no more than a foot or eighteen inches in width had near the mainland less than sixty miles south been eaten by running water to a width of four or five feet, so that to cross them with a sled became a difficult matter. The season seemed to be a full month earlier on the mainland than on Victoria Island.

We kept our course for Point Tinney, guided still by our conspicuous mountain, for we were fortunate enough to have clear weather all the way. We were still twelve or fifteen miles off the mainland shore and just passing the mouth of the Crocker River when in one of our short halts we heard a noise as of the rustling of wind among leaves or as the roar of a waterfall made faint through distance. I took the noise to be made by the rushing waters of Crocker River, but Natkusiak was of another opinion.

Eskimo Becomes Timid.

He had been worried from the start about the crossing, for, like all Eskimo known to me, he was excessively timid in the matter of venturing far offshore on the sea ice. He now declared that it was clear that the ice on which we were had drifted offshore and what we heard was the noise of the waves breaking against the edge of the ice floe on which we were floating off to sea. I did not much believe this, but acting (as I always mean to do) on the principle that it is better to be safe than sorry, and at the strong insistance of Natkusiak I headed straight for shore so as to find out the worst at once. The main object of the crossing had been accomplished—that of showing that Clerk Island was not where it is located on the charts—but had we continued our course for Point Tinney we should have saved a day of extra travel.

It turned out that those last twelve miles or so before reaching shore were a very difficult stretch to negotiate. The nearer we got to land the more water there was on the ice and the deeper were the channels through which it was running toward the tide cracks by which it joined the water of the sea. Many of these channels were eighteen inches or even two feet in depth, and here and there actual holes had appeared in the ice so that we had to be careful to see that neither ourselves nor our sled and dogs went through to the bottom.

Perhaps three miles from shore we were stopped by a lead about twenty feet wide. It was clear now that Natkusiak had been mistaken, and that the noise we heard was really the noise of Crocker River. It is probable that had we kept our course for Point Tinney we should not have been confronted at landing with so wide a lead as this was, for the fresh water brought down from inland by Crocker River had evidently contributed much to the decay of the ice in the immediate vicinity. In fact the mud brought down by the river was scattered all over the ice, and this had much accelerated the thawing. The point at which we were trying to land was four or five miles west of the mouth of Crocker River.

A twenty foot lead is, of course, far too wide to cross in the ordinary way, but before devising extraordinary means we scouted a mile or so east and west along the lead to see if there were no narrow places, or else loose ice cakes, one of which we could use for a raft in crossing. There was no sign of either. To the eastward the lead naturally got wider and wider toward the mouth of the river; to the westward it maintained its width, and its course ran through such rough pressure ice that to follow it with a sled was out of the question.

The lead was full of seals. We first thought of shooting two or three of them, skinning them, inflating the skins and using them for floats to carry the sled across the lead—a thing which Eskimo often do (such an inflated sealskin has the buoyancy of about 300 pounds). We had, however, been wading knee deep through water for ten or twelve hours and were cold, tired and sleepy, and impatient of any delay such as would have been caused by the killing and skinning of several seals. Besides the wind was beginning to blow from offshore and there as no means of telling that delay would not be disastrous. At this season of the year a strong land wind may drive all the ice away from shore and break it up into small cakes—just what Natkusiak had supposed was happening when we first heard the noise of Crocker River.

An Improvised Raft.

We had with us a ten gallon galvanized iron screw topped tank, which had originally contained alcohol for the preservation of zoological specimens, but which we had for a year used in our sledge travel as a receptacle for blubber for our dogs and lamps. We had also a five gallon kerosene tin and a brass water bottle which we had used for carrying drinking water. What kerosene there was left in the tin we emptied into a teapot and a tin dish we had with us; then we closed tightly the alcohol tin and the water bottle and lashed them to the frame of our sled, which we had previously nailed.

With a shovel for a paddle we pushed the sledge into the water and I got aboard it to paddle across. As a measure of precaution we took care before launching the sled into the water to fasten a rope to it for Natkusiak to hold, so that in case the buoyancy proved insufficient he would at least be able to haul me back to the ice again.

The floating power of the sledge fitted with the tin cans proved to be just so much that it settled till the water was up to my waist as I sat on the sled. Paddling it was slow work, and much to the surprise of both of us it kept settling gradually until I was nearly up to my arms in the water, and it became evident that our contrivance was going to sink.

This seemed to me to controvert the laws of nature, but nevertheless I told Natkusiak to pull the sled back again. When we got the sled up on the ice, it turned out that the alcohol can had half filled with water. Two years before we had cached it with its contents of alcohol near the tip of Cape Perry, and on our return a few months after leaving it we found it empty and lying on its side. We had taken it for granted that a polar bear had upset it and that the alcohol had leaked through the screw top, and although since then we had used it for a year as a blubber receptacle, we had never noticed the fact that there was in the bottom of it a round hole a quarter of an inch in diameter, through which the water had of course rushed in to fill the can as soon as we had pushed the sledge raft into the water.

We emptied the can, blocked up the hole, launched the sledge again, and this time I was able to paddle it all the way across the lead without getting any deeper than the waist into the water. When I was once across, it was a simple matter by the use of a rope to pull the sledge backwards and forwards across the lead, and in that way to ferry all our gear safely over in a dozen or so loads of fifty pounds each. Next to the last came the dogs, for it was freezing rather hard, and we did not care to make the poor animals swim. Last of all Natkusiak himself was hauled over. Half an hour later we were safely ashore on the mainland of the continent of North America and had built a roaring driftwood fire. For the time being our troubles were over.

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Westchester's Dickensesque Refuge Plan

Sheriff Merritt's Legacy to Shelter Indigent Travellers—"Pip" the War Hero

SHOULD Dickens's "Six Poor Travellers" cross the ocean in about a year, hoodwink the immigration officials and journey over the Boston post road to Port Chester they would find a haven equal to that which they left in the quaint English city of Rochester. Food, entertainment and a lodging for the night will be theirs, free of charge, free of care and free of that worst of bugaboos of indigent wanderers in fact and fiction—work. As an offset to this state of bliss they will find that it lasts for one night only. After breakfast the wayfarers must be up and packing, just as they did in the English refuge.

It was Richard Watts, Esq., who by his will of August 22, 1579, founded the British charity for poor travellers. It was James S. Merritt, ex-Sheriff of Westchester, who provided "a free lodging house for indigent transients" in his will of April 7, 1919.

The estimable Watts specified in his bequest that travellers "who not being rogues or proctors may receive gratis for one night lodging, entertainment and fourpence each." No such restriction is placed on the legacy left by Mr. Merritt. By power of his office he had learned that no rogue within his district would be in need of assistance, and as for proctors, well, as the dictionary gives half a dozen definitions of the word it is quite safe to say that he passed them over in silence. However, as "proctor" was a cant term in Watts's time for professional beggar or mendicant, again it is safe to say that class of parasite will find the wooden portals of Mr. Merritt's rest house barred.

Now the "Six Poor Travellers" are not mentioned here solely for the purpose of comparison. According to Mr. Merritt's friends, the Port Chester refuge plan was inspired by Dickens's delightful tale "The Seven Poor Travellers," that being its right name, although there were properly only six. The place is also to be a memorial to Mr. Merritt's mother, who devoted much of her life to relieving suffering and poverty.

Sheriff Fred, as everybody throughout the length, breadth, dingles and dells of Westchester called him, was steeped in Dickens lore. As a true disciple of the Master Writer he had the good nature of Mr. Pickwick, the jollity of Mark Tapley and the tenderness of Tom Pinch. He lived a Dickensesque existence, quoted Dickens constantly, and his friends declare that had custom permitted he would have dressed like one of the Cheeryble brothers, for those were his favorite characters. One of his hobbies was to pick Dickens characters from among the tradesmen. His chief complaint was that he could find no law stationer to fit Snagsby's niche and "lay down another half crown."

"But perhaps it is just as well," he often remarked, "for if a boy was to die here as little Joe died, well, I wouldn't stand that sort of thing, that's all."

Of course the big blacksmith who hammered and clinked at his forge on the outskirts of the town was "Jo Gargery." Not a whit did it matter to the Sheriff that the maker of horseshoes and welder of wagon tires had no shrewish wife, but the happiest of homes and a son who had captured first prize in the high school debating contest. "He looks the part," was Mr. Merritt's explanation and critical friends agreed. Incidentally "Gargery" was one of the Sheriff's favorites and the latter was often among the group drawn to the cindery shop of a night by the witchery of glowing metal and mystery muttering bellows.

Then there was "Pip." He first came to Sheriff Fred's notice as a shy, tow headed urchin sitting near the resonant anvil one crisp October evening. His odd words, "I wish I could catch one of them so it might tell me where they all go," while he watched sparks dart from the tingling metal, started the friendship. He was christened "Pip" on the spot and grew into the Sheriff's heart from that moment. Many a ramble they took together, for the youngster's quaint, original sayings were a delightful remedy for the annoyances of official cares.

But like the "Pip" for whom he was named the youngster never came into "Great Expectations" which many townspeople predicted for him. He attained the kind that neither moth nor rust corrupt.

When war was declared the lad had just passed that great event—the first long trousers. A few days later he was missing and Sheriff Fred was deeply worried, his parents distraught while the whole town felt uneasy. Then came the news that dreamy eyed "Pip" had told a white lie (which isn't a lie at all, but the noblest words that can pass the lips of any one) and had boosted his age a bit to join the army.

Of course the Sheriff fussed and fumed, but it was noticed that a picture of the boy in uniform was placed on the most prominent part of Mr. Merritt's desk and that he spent an uncommon amount of time at the desk.

Within a few months the young soldier sailed. After that followed the weary days of waiting. First it was for notes that told of safe arrival, then for the dread roll which cast its shadow on so many homes, the casualty list.

The blow came just as Sheriff Fred had finished chuckling over a whimsical letter from his protege, a note explaining a bit of barter in which Yankee wits were matched against a French peasant's shrewdness. Thrown in at the end was a postscript telling of promotion won by an excursion into the perils of No Man's Land.

"Killed in action" was the curt epitaph of the War Department message. When the red tape was unravelled it became known that Pip, he of the winsome, shy ways, had given his life so that a wounded "buddy" might reach the shelter of shell hole.

"God needed him to make heaven safe for democracy" was the Sheriff's husky comment as the vivid sparks disappeared over the silent group about the forge that night.

Each Christmas Sheriff Fred would scour Westchester for "Bob Cratchitts" and "Tiny Tims" and if any one went hungry during the merry season it was that particular one's own fault. He delighted in routing distress in odd, mysterious ways and many who were benefited never knew the kind hand that had helped them.

Toward the latter end of his life he confided to special friends his project for building the refuge for "indigent transients." That was what he always called poverty stricken, lonely down and outs. It was his way of sparing their feelings and what lingering pride was left.

There is $7,000 set aside specially for the building of the shelter, but it is understood that further arrangements have been made for maintenance. A number of Westchester citizens have become interested and have volunteered that in case funds fail to provide free "lodgings and entertainment" they will see that the cupboard never is bare. One good hearted, enthusiastic soul has offered the permanent use of an automobile to give the wanderers a lift on the first leg of their journey "the next morning." The plan is being considered. Another wishes to sponsor an endless supply of stout stockings. A third is willing to issue orders for the soling and heeling of boots and shoes.

These and many similar pledges of assistance were sources of great joy to the Sheriff as he neared the final goal. And he took great pleasure in telling his cronies so.

"It all goes to prove what Dickens sought to teach—there is far more good in the world than bad and there is a soft spot in every one's heart," was one of his last sage remarks as he feebly jotted down the parting instructions for his legacy to humanity, "The Poor Travellers."

Thaw Catches Party and Necessitates Conversion of Sledge Into Boat to Carry Explorers Over Dangerously Wide "Lead" in Ice

Mr. Goslington on Excess Talk

"IT is my opinion," said Mr. Goslington, "that beggars talk too much. For instance, this morning I met a man who asked me for a nickel with which to buy a cup of coffee. As I was reaching for the nickel he kept right on talking, telling me among other things that he hadn't had anything to eat for three days, which I knew of course was false, and which detracted very much from my pleasure in giving.

"I am an easy mark. Perhaps as I grow older I shall grow harder, but as I feel about it now I would rather give to a dozen frauds than take a chance of missing one man who was hungry. Still, I don't like the fraud to be too obvious; and I am sure there must be many prospective givers who, when the beggar keeps on with that surplus talk, rescind their original determination to give and keep their money in their pocket. Surely you would think the beggar would learn wisdom and talk less, wouldn't you?

"But the beggar is not the only man. How often do we hear it said of some banquet speaker that he is a good talker but he talks too much! This may seem a harsh way of putting it, but that's what people say. This speaker starts engagingly and talks for a time to the pleasure of everybody, wandering on then interminably to the complete obliteration of the first favorable impression. Here the only result is the tiring of the speaker's hearers; but talking too much might have a far more serious result in the case of, say, a man applying for a job.

"Many a man has talked himself out of a prospective job. He goes to the employer with what he wants to say clearly laid out in his mind, he says this clearly and simply, and the employer has practically made up his mind to take him; but then the applicant keeps on talking, to his own undoing. As he talks he reveals himself in a light less favorable; he discloses perhaps some peculiarity that may not really be a detriment but that strikes the employer not agreeably; and so this job that at first the applicant had felt perfectly sure of slips away from him entirely and without his realizing just how it all came about.

"The beggar is far from being alone in overtalking. There are many men in many walks who lack the fine gift of knowing when to stop."